ABBA®

GOLD

GREATEST HITS

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ABBA in Brighton for the Eurovision Song Contest.

WHEREAS 'WATERLOO' as a concept once used to symbolize defeat, certain events taking place in Brighton, England on April 6, 1974 seemed to give it a slightly different meaning. It was on that day that ABBA not only achieved their victory in the Eurovision Song Contest, but also started a victorious career around the globe, which was to make them one of the largest-selling acts ever in the history of popular music. In addition, this marked the first time that a Swedish pop group made any lasting impact on the international music scene.

For it was from Sweden they hailed: Björn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson were barely out of their teens when they met in the Summer of 1966 (Benny was still only 19). At that time, Björn was a member of the Hootenanny Singers, a very popular folk music group, while Benny played the electric organ in Sweden's biggest pop group of the 1960s, The Hep Stars.

This initial meeting soon led to their first songwriting collaboration, and by the end of the decade they had established a regular partnership as composers, Benny having left The Hep Stars, and the Hootenanny Singers virtually existing only in the recording studio.

In full regalia in the glam year of 1974. ►

The Kings and Queens of 1970s pop.

The Hootenanny Singers released their records on the Polar Music record label, owned by the dynamic Stig Anderson who was to become ABBA's manager. Stig recognized the talents of Björn and Benny as songwriters and producers, assuring them that they would eventually conquer the world, in the meantime hiring them as house producers from the Autumn of 1971 onwards.

By that time, Björn and Benny had already met what was to become the other half of ABBA. Agnetha Fältskog had been a successful solo singer, recording her first single in October 1967. In 1969, she and Björn became an item when the two of them appeared in the same television special, and in July 1971 the couple got married.

Anni-Frid Lyngstad, also known as Frida, started her recording career only one month before Agnetha. Frida was actually of Norwegian origin, but had moved to Sweden at a very early age. She met Benny when the two of them were performing in the same town in March 1969. They soon got engaged, but did not marry until October 1978.

From 1970 onwards, the four future ABBA members were often heard guesting on the recordings they each made as solo or duo acts, especially when backing vocals were needed. Indeed, it was the magical sound of their four voices combined that first sparked the idea of a collaboration. The first attempt to go public as a group was the cabaret act Fest-

folk (having the double meaning "engaged couples" and "party people") in November 1970. Unfortunately, this turned out to be a failure.

But in the Spring of 1972 the four friends gave it another go, this time as a pop act. A song entitled 'People Need Love' was recorded, giving the group a medium-sized hit in Sweden: at this time they called themselves Björn & Benny, Agnetha & Anni-Frid.

Encouraged by this success, they entered the 1973 Swedish selection for the Eurovision Song Contest with the song 'Ring Ring'. At the time, the finals of this contest – watched by several hundred million viewers – was about the only way for an act from continental Europe to make an international impact. The group only finished third in the selection, meaning that they would miss out on that crucial television performance, but the song and the album of the same name both became huge hits in Sweden.

THE GROUP ENTERED THE SELECTION again in 1974, this time with 'Waterloo', which took them all the way to the finals in Brighton, England. By this time they had changed their name to ABBA, an acronym of their first names. Abba was also the name of a Swedish canned fish company, which luckily agreed to lending their name to a pop group.

ABBA's Eurovision Song Contest triumph truly opened the doors to the international music scene: 'Waterloo' was soon #1 on the charts in Great Britain, Ireland, West Germany, Norway, Finland, Switzerland, South Africa and Belgium, reaching the Top Five in many other countries. The song even hit #6 in America, where Eurovision didn't mean a thing, proving that 'Waterloo' was strong enough to be a hit without the support of the contest. The album of the same name made less impact in most countries, but was hugely successful in Sweden.

However, attached with the stigma of being winners of the lightweight Eurovision Song Contest, ABBA found it difficult to be taken seriously in certain countries when they tried to follow this first success. It was not until some 18 months later that they got a major worldwide hit again with 'SOS', a pop masterpiece taken off their third album, simply titled *ABBA*. 'SOS' reached #15 in the US, and was a Top Five or Top 10 hit in several other countries. In the UK, it was the first of 18 consecutive Top 10 hits.

'Mamma Mia', also taken from *ABBA*, returned the group to the UK #1 spot, which they occupied a total of nine times between 1974 and 1980. In addition, 'Mamma Mia' was a #1 hit in Australia, which was the first territory to release it as a single in August 1975. Over the next few years, Australia would be caught up in a virtual ABBA fever, giving the group no less than six #1 hits.

While 'SOS' and 'Mamma Mia' were climbing up the charts all over the world, ABBA themselves were already busy recording their next two singles. The first one, 'Fernando', started life as a Swedish-language song for a solo album by Frida, but its hit potential meant that an English version by ABBA was released as a single in the Spring of 1976. It became one of the group's biggest hits ever, reaching #1 in at least 10 countries.

"Over the next few years, Australia was caught up in a virtual ABBA fever"

The second song was the classic 'Dancing Queen', released as the first single off ABBA's 1976 *Arrival* album, and performed at a televised gala tribute the day before the marriage between Sweden's King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia in June 1976. Even

more successful than 'Fernando', 'Dancing Queen' reached the top on almost every chart it entered – it was ABBA's only US #1. Two further singles were released from *Arrival*: 'Money, Money, Money' towards the end of 1976, and in March 1977 the emotional 'Knowing Me, Knowing You', which spent five weeks at the top of the UK charts.

ABBA WERE NOW FIRMLY ESTABLISHED as one of the world's most popular recording acts, and in February and March 1977 they embarked on their first major tour, taking place in Europe and Australia. Perhaps the success of this tour is best illustrated by the millions of ticket applications that were received for the two concerts at London's comparatively tiny Royal Albert Hall. During the tour, scenes were also filmed for the feature film *ABBA – The Movie*, which received its world première in December 1977. At the same time the new, similarly titled LP, *ABBA – The Album*, was released. It had been preceded by the single 'The Name Of The Game', a new step in terms of complexity that hit #1 in the UK and Ireland, also reaching the upper regions of the charts most everywhere else.

The second single from the new album was the bouncy 'Take A Chance On Me', ABBA's second most successful single in the US, where it reached Number Three. This was partly a result of a major promotional campaign in the United States during the Spring of 1978, including an appearance on an Olivia Newton-John TV special.

Even before the US visit, ABBA had started recording their next LP. The first single to be released off this album was 'Chiquitita', premièred at an all-star UNICEF gala in New York in January 1979. While Benny and Frida were married only a few months previously, the release of the 'Chiquitita' single coincided with the sad news that Björn and Agnetha had decided to get a divorce. As they both were quick to point out, this did not

mean the end of ABBA. In the eyes of the world, however, a crack appeared in the image of two happy couples united to create glorious pop music.

The new album, *Voulez-Vous*, was released at the end of April 1979, almost simultaneously with 'Does Your Mother Know', the last ABBA single to feature Björn on lead vocals. As a follow-up, the disco-flavoured title track off the album was released in the Summer.

"It seemed ABBA were unstoppable"

'Voulez-Vous' (the song) had been written in the Bahamas, and its backing track was committed to tape in Criteria Studios, Miami, USA – the only ABBA hit not to be recorded in Stockholm, Sweden.

ABBA's next single was also a disco track, but was a brand new recording. 'Gimme! Gimme! Gimme! (A Man After Midnight)' was released to coincide with a major tour of Canada, the United States and Europe in the Autumn of 1979, only their second such outing. The single was a Top Three hit in most European countries and also in Japan.

Although four singles in one year would have been considered quite a generous output, ABBA finished off 1979 with yet another release: just before the year drew to a close they returned to the *Voulez-Vous* album and issued the optimistic ballad 'I Have A Dream' in 7-inch format. This decision rewarded them with #1 hits in Switzerland and The Netherlands, as well as #2 peak positions on the British and Irish charts. With five hits within the space of 12 months, it seemed ABBA were unstoppable.

In March 1980, the group brought their 1979 tour line-up to Japan for what turned out to be their very last live concerts on foreign soil. By this time, ABBA had already

Smiling happily in 1976, the year of Dancing Queen and the Arrival album. ►

started recording their next album, although the first single wasn't released until July. The lyrics for 'The Winner Takes It All' were coloured by Björn and Agnetha's divorce: the heartbreak conveyed in both words and music certainly seemed to capture the imagination of a great number of pop music fans, as the song reached #1 in the UK, Ireland, Belgium, South Africa and The Netherlands.

The next single, 'Super Trouper', was the lead-off release from the album of the same name in November 1980, becoming ABBA's last UK #1. But only a few months later the final blow was dealt to the group's happy-couples image of the 1970s, for in February 1981, Benny and Frida announced their divorce. However, as in the case of Björn and Agnetha's marital split, it was maintained that Benny and Frida's decision did not affect their work with ABBA, and the group soon started work on their next album.

WHILE THE WORLD WAS WAITING for brand new ABBA recordings, a final track from the *Super Trouper* album received a somewhat limited release as a 12-inch single. 'Lay All Your Love On Me', issued in the Summer of 1981, was certainly one of ABBA's best dance tracks. The song reached the #7 position on the UK charts – the highest placing of a song exclusively released as a 12-inch single up to that point.

It wasn't until the end of the year that the group offered the public a brand new track: the single 'One Of Us' reached record shops almost simultaneously with ABBA's eighth and final album, *The Visitors*, in December 1981. As usual, both album and single soon conquered the charts all over Europe, with 'One Of Us' being the last of the band's nine #1 singles in West Germany.

Although ABBA had made their way through the sometimes difficult recording of

◄ Surrounded by friends and circus artists for the Super Trouper video and album cover.

The Visitors, the four members were beginning to feel that the group was running out of energy. 1982 turned out to be their final year together, and it was a period when they all started to branch out into separate projects. Significantly, the year began with Frida recording her first solo album since 1975, produced by Phil Collins. When ABBA reconvened in the recording studio in May, it was with the view to record a new studio album. Those plans were soon whittled down to the release of a double-album of their singles with two new tracks included, and all in all only six new songs were recorded during 1982.

BY THE END OF THE YEAR, it had been decided that ABBA would take a break, so that Björn and Benny could collaborate with Tim Rice on the musical *Chess*. Meanwhile, Agnetha followed Frida's lead and recorded a solo album of her own. To plug the gap while no new ABBA releases were forthcoming, a few countries released the *ABBA – The Album* track 'Thank You For The Music' as a single in 1983. This song – taken from ABBA's mini-musical *The Girl With The Golden Hair*, performed during their 1977 tour – had up to this point primarily been used as a B-side on single releases. In effect, one of the most well-known ABBA songs never really got the chance to become a worldwide hit while the group still existed.

"ABBA Gold reawakened the interest in the group and their music"

It was not long before it was clear that ABBA's "temporary" break was in fact a permanent one. While Björn and Benny went on to write another musical, the Swedish-language *Kristina från Duvemåla* ("Kristina From Duvemåla", premièred in 1995), Frida's

last international album release was *Shine* in 1984, although 1996 saw her return with a new album for the Swedish market. To date, Agnetha has recorded three further solo albums, the latest of which was *My Colouring Book*, released in 2004.

Meanwhile, with the release in 1992 of the *ABBA Gold* album, interest in the group and their music was reawakened all over the world. Indeed, part of the success of the album was bringing ABBA's music to a new generation of fans, affectionately termed "goldies" in certain fan-circles. Worldwide sales have now passed 26 million copies.

The ABBA revival received a further boost in 1999 with the London première of the musical *Mamma Mia!*, based on the group's songs. The musical quickly became one of the biggest hits in many years in London's theatre district, and to date it has conquered audiences all over the planet, breaking ticket sales records and generally taking the show business world by storm.

ABBA THEMSELVES remain as one of the few classic acts to completely avoid a reunion. But their songs and recordings are still here, and the formidable force of *ABBA Gold* and *Mamma Mia!* combined will certainly go on sending pop music lovers into the welcoming arms of ABBA music for many years to come. ■

Carl Magnus Palm, with thanks to Ian Cole and Trent Nickson

Carl Magnus Palm is the author of Bright Lights Dark Shadows – The Real Story of ABBA (Omnibus Press).

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01. **DANCING QUEEN** 3:51	℗ 1976	
02. **KNOWING ME, KNOWING YOU** 4:01	℗ 1976	
03. **TAKE A CHANCE ON ME** 4:06	℗ 1977	
04. **MAMMA MIA** 3:30	℗ 1975	
05. **LAY ALL YOUR LOVE ON ME** 4:32	℗ 1980	
06. **SUPER TROUPER** 4:11	℗ 1980	
07. **I HAVE A DREAM** 4:43	℗ 1979	
08. **THE WINNER TAKES IT ALL** 4:55	℗ 1980	
09. **MONEY, MONEY, MONEY** 3:06	℗ 1976	
10. **SOS** 3:21	℗ 1975	
11. **CHIQUITITA** 5:25	℗ 1979	
12. **FERNANDO** 4:12	℗ 1976	
13. **VOULEZ-VOUS** 5:06	℗ 1979	
14. **GIMME! GIMME! GIMME! (A MAN AFTER MIDNIGHT)** 4:49	℗ 1979	
15. **DOES YOUR MOTHER KNOW** 3:13	℗ 1979	
16. **ONE OF US** 3:54	℗ 1981	
17. **THE NAME OF THE GAME** 4:52	℗ 1977	
18. **THANK YOU FOR THE MUSIC** 3:48	℗ 1977	
19. **WATERLOO** 2:45	℗ 1974	

℗ 1974-1981 Polar Music International AB.
All songs written by B. Andersson & B. Ulvaeus, except 1, 2, 4, 10, 12, 17 & 19, written by B. Andersson, S. Anderson & B. Ulvaeus. All titles produced by B. Andersson & B. Ulvaeus. All songs published by Universal/Union Songs AB, except track 11 published by Music For Unicef. This compilation Chris Griffin, Jackie Stansfield, George McManus, John Tobler & Ingemar Bergman. Digitally remastered by Henrik Jonsson, Masters of Audio. Photos © Polar Music International AB. Original design by Icon. Redesign by Fredrik/Infinestyle.com. Project coordination by Mia Segolsson.

Official website: www.abbasite.com.

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◄ ABBA in 1978, at the height of their popularity.

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